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FM AMCONSUL KOLKATA
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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/INSB (TITUS)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [CONS](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: BRAZEN MAOIST/NAXAL ATTACK IN WEST BENGAL MAY STRENGTHEN
CALL FOR POLICE ACTION

¶1. (SBU) On February 15, in one of the most brazen and brutal Maoist/Naxal attacks in West Bengal in more than a decade, a group of alleged Communist Party of India-Maoist supporters killed approximately 24 state police. The attack took place in the remote rural settlement of Silda in West Midnapur (also written Shilda, West Medinipur) district located 250 kilometers west of Kolkata near the West Bengal-Jharkhand interstate border. According to media reports and post contacts, a group of approximately 40 Maoists with semi-automatic weapons shot the police, set fire to the camp, and escaped with arms and ammunition.

¶2. (SBU) The attack, ironically referred to as "Operation Peace Hunt" by the Maoist's military leader Kishanji, coincides with what appears to be the launch of a coordinated center-state anti-Maoist police action, named "Operation Green Hunt", in the Maoist affected states of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Orissa. While neither the press nor the government has officially confirmed the start of the operation, West Bengal police contacts confirm that operations are taking place on the ground.

¶3. (SBU) Over the past several months, Indian Home Minister P. Chidambaram has engaged with the leadership of the affected states seeking their political buy-in (law enforcement is a state, rather than a federal, responsibility). In a meeting in Kolkata on February 9 with the West Bengal and Orissa Chief Ministers, Chidambaram stressed the importance of a coordinated center-state effort consisting of both tactical police action followed by development and government outreach. Bihar's Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, represented at the Kolkata meeting by his deputy and senior civil servants, stressed a similar message, one that he had also shared with the Ambassador the previous week. The media has noted the absence of Jharkhand Chief Minister, Shibu Soren at this Kolkata meeting, and questioned the level of his support for the police operation given the political support Maoists/Naxals had allegedly provided his political party in that state's elections last November/December. Soren had, however, pledged to support the anti-Maoist operations in a meeting with Chidambaram last month.

Comment

¶4. (SBU) While a political consensus for a center-state

coordinated police anti-Maoist action remains elusive, the attack will likely increase the resolve of the West Bengal state government to go forward with Operation Green Hunt and increase the pressure on the reluctant Jharkhand Chief Minister, and to a lesser extent Bihar, to more fully endorse it. The Silda attack serves as a stark reminder of the costs of this ongoing low-level insurgency, which Prime Minister Singh has called the greatest threat to India's internal security.

PAYNE